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YOUNG FOLKS' PROGRAM

Friday, Dec. 16.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

SUBJECT: Alaskan Reindeer.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Well, here are Jim and his Uncle Abe of the United States Department of Agriculture! There is Sonny, Jim's little brother, too. The boys seem to be getting Christmas in their bones already. Look at Sonny there. He must be trying to get Uncle Abe to read him that book about "The Night Before Christmas". Evidently, Jim is getting interested in those pictures of Santa Claus and his reindeer himself.----- Listen!

JIM: Aw, don't read that Uncle Abe! Tell us a story of your own.

UNCLE ABE: Well, Jim, Sonny wants to hear about Santa and his reindeer.

JIM: Where do reindeer really come from, Uncle Abe?

UNCLE ABE: That's a long story. Reindeer have been grazed in northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, and Siberia since far back in history.

JIM: Tell us about them.

UNCLE ABE: Suppose, instead, I tell you how Uncle Sam used reindeer to play Santa Claus to the Eskimos in Alaska.

JIM: Sure! Go ahead.

UNCLE ABE: Forty years ago, there were no reindeer in Alaska.

JIM: Not any reindeer at all? I thought -----

UNCLE ABE: No. There were a few wild caribou, close kin to the reindeer; but not a reindeer. The Eskimos were hunters and fishermen, pretty much as they had always been. But the game and fish on which they depended for food and clothing keep getting scarcer and scarcer. Things looked bad for the Eskimos. The United States Bureau of Education which looked after the training of the young Eskimos saw that something must be done to save them. In 1891, it brought 10 reindeer to Alaska from Eastern Siberia, and the next year, 171 more. During the next ten years others were brought in. Altogether 1,280 reindeer were brought from Siberia. Eskimos knew nothing about reindeer. In order to show them the right way to take care of the herds, the Bureau of Education also brought Laplander herders from northern Norway. The young Eskimos, besides learning reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic, had to learn reindeer too. But when they had learned to care for the reindeer, they were given some animals of their own. In that way, many Eskimos changed from hunters to reindeer herders. Rein-



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deer supplied them with both food and warm clothing and the reindeer herds became bigger and bigger. To-day there are more than 300,000 reindeer in Alaska. Two-thirds of that number are owned by the Eskimos. But white men now raise reindeer, too, and they own the other third of the reindeer in Alaska. The reindeer business is growing all the time, and there is probably room in Alaska for as many as three or four million reindeer.

JIM: Do they have big herds of reindeer?

UNCLE ABE: Yes, the average herd has about 2,500 reindeer in it.

JIM: Do the Eskimos herd reindeer like cowboys do cattle?

UNCLE ABE: Well, Jim, the reindeer herder's job is something like a cowboy's, but the Eskimos herd reindeer on foot instead of on horses, and it doesn't take as much skill with the rope to lasso a reindeer as it does to rope a steer. But they handle them on the open range and round them up in much the same way, as cowboys do cattle. Reindeer in some ways are like cattle, but they band together more like sheep. In grazing, they trample over a good bit of range and feed more like horses.

JIM: Do Eskimos use the reindeer to pull sleighs like Santa Claus does?

UNCLE ABE: Yes, they use some of the reindeer to pull sleds. Reindeer learn quickly and are easily broken to drive, if you treat them gently. The use of sled reindeer is not so common in Alaska as it should be. Dog teams are better suited for travel on the main trails, but sled reindeer are cheaper and more practical for cross-country travel and for use hauling supplies to camps and rounding up the herds. Reindeer feed on the open range, so there is no need to carry food for them, on long trips.

JIM: What do they eat?

UNCLE ABE: Oh, chiefly sedges and grasses in summer. In winter they feed on reindeer moss and other lichens.

JIM: How can they get to them when the snow is on the ground?

UNCLE ABE: Well, as a rule, the snow doesn't worry the reindeer much; they have a knack of finding lichen forage even when it is buried under the snow. The reindeer just paw the snow out of the way. Often they'll paw through as much as two feet of packed snow and three feet or more of loose snow to get the lichens. Lichens, you know, are very slow-growing plants. For that reason, the scientists of the Department of Agriculture have made a study of the reindeer ranges to find out how many reindeer can be put on a range without damaging it.

JIM: How you mean'd damaging it?

UNCLE ABE: Overgrazing; eating down the lichens so much, that there won't be enough to keep the reindeer in feed or to grow up again. The number of reindeer you can raise on a range depends on the amount of lichens growing there, just

as the number of sheep or the number of cattle you can raise on a range depends on the grass and other plants that grow there.

Reindeer raising in Alaska is a new, big, fast growing business, and brings up a lot of problems which the scientists have to work upon. Reindeer, like any other kind of livestock, have their troubles. Because the Eskimos liked white reindeer hides for clothes, when reindeer raising began in Alaska, they kept all-white reindeer in their herds although scientists have found that they are not as strong and healthy as the darker reindeer. Now the government is encouraging better selection of animals, so that bigger, better reindeer stock can be raised in Alaska. That will mean more meaty and a stronger reindeer to pull the sleds. In fact, the scientists at the Department of Agriculture's reindeer experiment station in Alaska have caught some of those wild caribou I mentioned awhile ago as being native to Alaska. The caribou are larger than the reindeer, and by crossing them, a better type of reindeer will be produced. The reindeer experts are of the opinion that heavier reindeer can be developed by careful selection and mating. So you see, Jim, it was quite a gift Uncle Sam brought to the Eskimos when he gave them reindeer, and a gift that is still growing.

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